DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 714 EC 210 648

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TITLE Persistent Language/Learning Disability Problems in a College Level Population.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (New Orleans, LA, November 12-16, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Ability Identification; *Cognitive Ability; *College Students; Comparative Analysis; Educational Diagnosis; Handicap Identification; Higher Education; *Language Skills; *Language Tests; *Learning Disabilities; Oral Language; *Student Evaluation; Written Language

ABSTRACT

Twenty-two junior-year college students were tested at a college language, speech and hearing clinic. A statistical analysis was performed on their scores on the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery and on oral and written language samples. Results were compared with those of a group of 25 normal college students in their junior year. Results indicated that: (1) the Woodcock-Johnson subtests are able to distinguish the language and cognitive weaknesses of language/learning-disabled subjects; (2) there is a close relationship between cognitive and language functioning; (3) subtest results suggest the need for a great deal more expansion of the cognitive base for language functioning; and (4) this is reinforced by observation of the oral and written language samples of the subjects, where oral surface structure patterns are generally in place, but written language skills still demonstrate weaknesses in ability to expand ideas to the normal level. (JDD)

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TITLE: Persistent Language/Learning Disability Problems in a College Level Population

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During a period of two years the Language, Speech and Hearing Clinic at CSU, Northridge evaluated a number of college students either self referred from the community or referred by the Office of Disabled Students on campus. The latter office was interested in establishing that a problem did or did not exist so that adjunctive services could be supplied. Usually such students were at the Junior level or above suggesting that at earlier college levels they could, with extra work, follow the more structured curriculum of the Junior College relatively adequately. Complaints included the following:

1. not understanding what the instructor was saying
2. not understanding what the test question was asking for
3. requiring so much extra time to do any assignments
4. not being able to pass the all-university written English examination

EC 210648

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Approximately thirty such students were tested during the project. Statistics will be presented on twenty-two subjects ranging in age from twenty to forty years of age. Primary assessment devices included the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, the Celf, the Detroit Test of Learning Ability Verbal Absurdities subtest, the Listening Grammar subtest of the TOAL and the Proverbs Test. Oral and written language samples were evaluated for linguistic expansion, syntactic and pragmatic errors and narrative weaknesses. An MMU analysis was also made. The present statistical analysis on the twenty-two subjects involved only the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery and oral and written language sample results. The latter scores were compared with those of a group of twenty-five normal college students at the Junior year.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. The difference between language/reading and cognitive scores on the Woodcock-Johnson battery approached but did not reach the .05 level of significance (.057) suggesting that they

are not the same entity. However, the Spearman correlation between the two sets of scores (.001 level) would suggest that the individual language and reading scores do closely reflect the individual cognitive scores. This reinforces the idea that the problem may be a cognitive one as opposed to a strictly skills type.

2. The DTLA Verbal Absurdities scores had a median grade level of 14-6 indicating that overall the subjects were barely into the piagetian formal operational functioning level. Therefore, they were probably unable to easily process the abstractions of Junior level college work.

3. The median grade level on the Woodcock-Johnson subtests ranged between 5.8 and 12.9 as compared with a hypothetical grade level of 15 for the average Junior in college.

4. Although there was not a significant difference among the median scores for the various subtests, a number of the subtests deviated significantly from the expected levels for subjects of this age level.

5. Within the group of tests showing a significant difference from normal performance, there were two types: those which represented integration and processing of data and those which required perception for details. Both groupings support the subjects' original complaints regarding their academic functioning. Subtests which involved surface structure skills gave this group little difficulty.

6. Oral language was well developed in terms of syntax, pragmatics and expansion, although a few errors still remained. (syntactic: 48% of s's; pragmatic: 76%.)

7. The written narratives of the language/learning disabilities group differed significantly from those of the normal control group on a number of parameters:

Sentence length (MMU)	.001 level
Sentence expansion	.05 level
Number of sentences	.01 level
Narrative analysis	.05 level

8. The narrative analysis referred to above was of the Stein and Glen pattern. A subsequent narrative analysis using the Warren, Nicolas and Trabasso (1979) pattern indicated that 5% of the Language/Learning Disabilities narratives fell into the early sequences category while 21% were primitive narratives with 74% fully developed narratives. This compares with the 100% achievement of the narrative form for the normal control group.

SUMMARY:

1. It is obvious that the Woodcock-Johnson subtests do distinguish the language and cognitive weaknesses of this group of language/ learning disabled subjects.
2. Results also suggest a close relationship between cognitive and language functioning.
3. Subtest results also suggest the need for a great deal more expansion of the cognitive base for language functioning.

4. This is reinforced by observation of the oral and written language samples of the subject group.

   a. Oral surface structure patterns are generally in place.

   b. However, written language skills still demonstrate weaknesses in ability to expand ideas to the normal level.

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	OBSERVATION	SUBJECTS	SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL
I	Language/Reading: Cognitive Scores:			
	1. Wilcoxon Test	17	1.58	NS
	2. Spearman Rank Coefficient Correlation	17	.91	<.001
II	Assessment Task Differences:			
	Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery			
	Extension of Median Test		9.64	NS

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OBSERVATION	SUBJECTS	SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL
III Oral Language Performance:			
1. Sentence Expansion	10 (48%)	75%ile	
	9 (43%)	50%ile	
	2 (9%)	25%ile	
2. Demonstrated Error Forms			
Syntactic Errors	10	48%	
Pragmatic Errors	16	76%	
IV Written Language Performance:			
1. Sentence Expansion			
Mann-Whitney U Test	18	2.06	$<.05$
2. Mean Length of Utterance			
Mann-Whitney U Test	18	3.99	$<.001$

WOODCOCK-JOHNSON PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL BATTERY
SUBTEST COMPARISON

Perceived Order of Difficulty		Median Grade Level:
2	Spatial Relations	4.2
11	Concept Formation	5.8**
7	Visual Matching	7.7**
9	Analysis-Synthesis	7.9**
14	Word Attack	8.3**
19	Proofing	9.9*
18	Dictation	10.8*
12	Analogies	10.9*
15	Passage Comprehension	11.2**
6	Quantitative Concepts	11.6**
3	Memory for Sentences	11.9
13	Letter-Word Identification	12.3
10	Numbers Reversed	12.8
1	Picture Vocabulary	12.9
8	Antonyms-Synonyms	12.9
5	Blending	12.9
4	Visual Auditory Learning	12.9

**.01 level of significance
*.05 level of significance

- difference from normal controls

APPENDIX I

Presenting Problems

Although not every student complained of each problem, the following created most difficulty:

1. Most important where writing skills.
    a. spelling errors which were not noted
    b. being able to put ideas together cohesively
    c. being able to think of something to say
    d. word finding/vocabulary difficulty
2. Math problems were also indicated.
    a. inability to see errors
    b. using the correct formula but getting incorrect answers
    c. having difficulty with numbers in terms of what their relationships represent
    d. "getting lost" in word problems
3. Receptive language ability.
    a. inability to follow oral directions
    b. problems with retaining messages in short term memory

c. difficulty processing abstract concepts

4. Expressive language ability.

a. difficulty organizing their thoughts and expressing them verbally

b. word finding difficulty

c. difficulty with verbal reasoning

d. difficulty with organizing and sequencing tasks

5. Test taking difficulties.

a. time factors

b. interpretation and understanding of the test question

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